DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 911 EA 026 635

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TITLE How To Improve Teacher Morale: Create a Duty-Free School.
INSTITUTION National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Va.
PUB DATE Mar 95
NOTE 4p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1537 ($2; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
JOURNAL CIT Tips for Principals; Mar 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Flexible Scheduling; Principals; School Schedules; *School Supervision; *Supervisory Methods; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Burnout; Teacher Morale; Teacher Motivation; *Teaching Conditions

ABSTRACT

The school-reform movement has not as yet helped to relieve teachers of their nonteaching duties. One result of shared decision making is that some principals have replaced student-supervisory duties with that of committee work. These duties can take as much time as many of the traditional nonteaching duties. One way to improve teacher morale and create a positive school climate is to eliminate unnecessary teaching duties. This document offers suggestions for planning and creating a "duty-free" school, in which teacher supervisory duties are eliminated or greatly reduced. First, a schoolwide study group can be formed to examine school needs and elicit feedback. Tips for reducing student supervisory responsibilities are offered, some of which include combining classroom periods, using walkie-talkies to monitor trouble spots, utilizing existing aides or volunteers, offering scheduling options for teachers, limiting student free times and closing specified areas, and reducing hall traffic. (LMI)

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Tips for Principals
March 1995
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How to Improve Teacher Morale: Create a Duty-Free School

The movement for school reform has affected all of us, but it does not seem to have had a great impact in relieving teachers of their non-teaching duties. We have the goal of redirecting teacher's time away from supervision, but the Carnegie Foundation's *Report Card on School Reform 1988* found that a mere 21 percent of teachers reported more freedom from non-instructional duties; a disappointing 16 percent said they had more time for preparation.

An interesting development in shared decision making (important in school reform) is that some principals are replacing one type of duty (student supervision) with another. The new duty is committee work: Q teams, leadership groups, etc., that help lead and manage the school. Research finds that such "duties" can take as much time as many of the traditional non-teaching duties (Richardson and Sistrunk, 1989).

As most principals know, teachers can resent assigned supervisory roles, especially when they believe those roles should be the sole responsibility of the administrator(s). Teachers often see classroom interruptions and managerial tasks as virtually overwhelming handicaps in their attempts to perform the core instructional tasks for which they were hired (Kasten, 1984).

Most teachers list their role as baby-sitters as a reason for burnout. One way to improve teacher morale and create a positive climate for teaching is to eliminate unnecessary duties that take up an often-troublesome amount of teachers' time. Obviously, the time that teachers do not have to devote to supervising students outside the classroom can be spent planning and preparing.

The somewhat drastic proposal of creating a "duty free" school must be carefully thought out and planned. A principal can present the proposal to his or her staff and form a study group to explore the possibilities. After carefully evaluating every possible aspect of the proposal, the study group should be able to determine how many of the non-teaching duties can be reassigned or eliminated. Changes that are not satisfactory can, of course, be modified or dropped at any time. Even if conditions frustrate an across-the-board reduction in duties, the teachers will appreciate the principal's effort to address this concern.

For their part, teachers must redefine their responsibilities to include a variety of non-teaching tasks. They must determine how much time to devote to "boundary" work and how much to their core instructional tasks (Kasten, 1984). They must develop ways to buffer their instructional role or face the prospect of experiencing a reduced commitment to their work or workplaces (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990).

Most schools need to supervise students at least four times a day: before school, passing between classes (teachers should be by their doors at these times), lunch, and after school. Suggestions that the study committee might explore in dealing with these times include:

- ✓ Commitment from administrator(s) that they will be on duty during critical times.
- ✓ Combining the homeroom with the first or second periods to eliminate at least one passing period and result in fewer students roaming the halls.
- ✓ Purchasing walkie-talkies. Extremely effective for campus coverage, walkie-talkies allow supervisors to converge sooner on problem areas. Several teachers in schools where I

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was principal whose rooms were near "trouble spots" (the gym, rest rooms, parking areas, stairs, back doors, etc.) and who had walkie-talkies found that the devices improved their sense of security. Principals can assign walkie-talkies to teachers who are regularly near problem areas, other administrators, office personnel, custodians, anyone who might have a "need to know," or anyone who might be in a position to help in the event a problem develops.

- ✓ Reassigning one period during lunch for cafeteria supervision, or having staff members interested in administration volunteer before and after school.
- ✓ Allowing teachers with last period planning to sign up for before-school supervisory duty, then allowing them to go home after their final teaching period.
- ✓ Allowing teachers with first period planning to sign up for after-school coverage. These schedules can be arranged for the coming year during the spring schedule review.
- ✓ Using existing aides or hiring others for supervisory duties.
- ✓ Decreasing the amount of students' non-scheduled time.
- ✓ Confining students before/after school and at lunch to areas that can be easily monitored.
- ✓ Limiting the number of lunch periods to make monitoring more effective.
- ✓ Using parent volunteers.
- ✓ Closing specified areas of the campus to students before/after school and at lunch.
- ✓ In middle level schools, positioning teams as close to each other as possible; in the high school, grouping classes by grade instead of by department to keep students in more easily monitored areas.
- ✓ Assigning lockers near students' first period classes to reduce hall traffic.

The administrative team must be diligent in their duty-related responsibilities. The extent to which the principal and the assistants are "tied up" in the office is the extent to which failure is predictable. Not only does a visible administrative team reassure the staff, their presence reminds the students of who is in charge.

The benefits to teachers are obvious. They can devote more time to the planning, tutoring, etc., that they were hired for.

As a principal, I was able to eliminate duties, except for lunch coverage, at a large middle school and eliminate most duties at a medium size high school (although we still had to have teachers by their doors during passing time). Reducing or eliminating duties had positive effects. The teachers felt that the changes had relieved them of a large burden.

While we did not undertake a formal survey to evaluate the effects of this policy, informal evidence and consistently positive responses proved that this was a strong morale booster. The extra time allowed teachers to perform many tasks that they would ordinarily do on their own time.

My experience with eliminating teacher supervisory duty never compromised student safety or security. As in virtually every aspect of school life, success ends up being a combination of the administration's supervisory diligence and everyone working together toward a common goal.

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Tips for Principals
is a monthly publication of
The National Association
of Secondary School Principals
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Reston, Virginia 22091-1537

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